

SODC Monthly Report - Dec 2022
Cllr Caroline Newton, Haseley Brook Ward

Planning

The Government (DLUHC) has agreed to pay the final tranche of £30 million from the £215mn Housing and Growth Deal - agreed in 2017 to accelerate the provision of affordable housing in the county - despite the local planning authorities failing to submit a joint spatial plan (Oxfordshire Plan 2050). The money will only be released if the county's local authorities are able to demonstrate housing is being built at an adequate rate.

Joint Local Plan (JLP) : Work on this strategic development plan continues - though now pushed back almost a year following the disbanding of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. SODC is preparing a summary of the responses received in its 'Issues Consultation' with the aim of publishing before Christmas. It is making progress with procuring consultants to undertake specialist studies for the JLP evidence base, including on Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities Strategy; Landscape evidence, Employment Land Needs Assessment; Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and Boat Dweller Accommodation Assessment; Specialist Housing Needs Assessment; Net Zero-Carbon Evidence Base; evidence on habitats and species decline.

SODC has responded to Oxford City's Local Plan consultation. The district council expressed concern about the city's expectation that it will not be able to identify land to meet its housing need, and that it will have to be built in the districts around the city. This so-called Duty to Cooperate was responsible for adding almost 5000 houses to SODC's Local Plan 2035. SODC is likely to argue that Oxford City needs to do more to identify locations where homes can be built within the city's boundary.

Thame Cattle Market: Work is continuing with plans to redevelop this site in the centre of Thame. Thame Farmers Auction Market, the current tenant, has confirmed it is seeking a 3 year extension of its existing lease to April 2027. SODC officers are liaising with Thame Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan Group.

As of 1 November there were 65,020 dwellings in South Oxfordshire (61,948 in Vale of the White Horse).

Housing Support

The housing team are still seeing an increase in demand for support because of the cost-of-living crisis and the Ukrainian refugee situation. The team is supporting 280 Ukrainian refugee households. SODC officers are also working with colleagues in Oxford City and elsewhere to re-match refugee households with new hosts. SODC is proposing to offer an emergency grant of up to £500 to assist Ukrainian households.

The number of homelessness cases is now higher than at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In November, the number of households who received case officer support to prevent or end homelessness was 52 - with 82% of cases being successfully resolved (compared to a SE average of 55%). At the end of November, the number of households in emergency accommodation in South Oxon was 16, a substantial increase from October, reflecting national pressures on housing services.

One household was moved from emergency accommodation to long-term accommodation in November. Officers are finding it increasingly difficult to access private rented properties because of the divergence between market and Local Housing Allowance rates.

With an intense focus on tackling rough sleeping, as of 30 November there was believed to be 1 rough sleeper in South Oxon.

In November, there were 1253 households on SODC's housing register.

Waste

The new collection routes for household waste have been rolled out over the last month, and SODC is hopeful service will improve from the erratic experiences some householders in South Oxfordshire have faced over the past 6 months.

A particular problem has been what are termed 'incomplete rounds' where collection rounds cannot be completed on the set day (because of vehicle break-downs etc) but are completed the following day. Properties towards the end of collection routes tend to be disproportionately affected by incomplete rounds, and people living in those places will regrettably have suffered some really poor service. In August and September, for example, about 91,000 properties across South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse were affected by incomplete rounds, against a target of no more than 2,000 per month.

Whilst the new collection routes aim to reduce the number of incomplete collections, October and November have seen an increase in the number of missed bins while the new routes bed in. Food bin collections have seen particular shortcomings. Officers assure me the disruptions will reduce dramatically in January once the new routes have bedded in.

In the meantime, where winter weather interrupts collections, residents are asked to keep their bins out for another day - and if they are then not collected, to put them out again at the next appropriate collection day. Where black (or 'grey') bins are missed, residents can put an extra sack out at the next black (or 'grey'!) collection day.

Tree Planting

South and Vale district councils have been awarded £150,000 from the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund. The money will be used to fund 2 posts who will be employed by OCC to accelerate tree-planting.

Councillor Community Grant scheme

This scheme allots each district councillor £5000 to allocate to initiatives in their ward. The current round of funding will be open to bids until midday on Friday 20 January. Please get in touch if your organisation would like to apply for a grant.

Pay Award

SODC reached agreement with Unison to pay £300 to all employees in December to reflect the cost-of-living situation.

Community Safety

SODC has received funding from OCC for a fixed-term post for a domestic abuse co-ordinator to help meet our responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The new officer has been recruited and is due to start in January.

As always, please get in touch with me if you have any issues you'd like to raise, or if you need help accessing SODC services. And in the meantime, I wish you all a restful Christmas and a healthy, prosperous New Year.

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